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LENS 5

Critical

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Purpose: To reflect on the societal norms from *Out of the Dust*

Audience: Other readers of the book or future readers.

Genre: Book reflection

Engagement: By writing this reflection, I can reveal social norms of the times in the book.

The stories of Billy Jo in *Out of the Dust* are emotional, and engaging. The accounts of her life really tug on a heart string of the reader. The book touches on issues of gender norms and on the norms of living in Oklahoma during the dust bowl. These things are shown throughout the book with different accounts and stories.

When Billy Jo was born, her Pa wanted a boy. She was even named ‘Billy Jo’, characteristically a boy’s name. Billy Jo’s Ma and Pa tried for more babies, Pa always hoping for a boy. I learned from watching *Little House on the Prairie* that back in those days on the Prairies, like in Oklahoma, boys were important to the family. Not only did they carry on the family name, but they were important to work on the farms and in the fields, because they were stronger than girls and the girls were expected to be in the kitchen and washing clothes and cleaning, not out in the fields or building fences. Since it was only Billy Jo, her Ma, and her Pa, Billy Jo had to help out with some things, especially when her Ma was pregnant and after her Ma and baby Franklin died. On page 77, Billy Jo is sent to get boards from the train yard, despite the burns and scabs on her hands. On page 110, Billy Jo has to scrub the house. The windows, steps, floors, she has to scrub the mud off of it all because her Ma was gone and that duty fell on her now. Even though her hands ached, she still did it because she was supposed to. When the FERA was hiring boys to do CCC work, Billy Jo ached to get out of the dust, but she was the wrong age and the wrong gender.

Living out west on the prairies is a totally different way of life than I’ve ever experienced. All I know is what I see on *Little House on the Prairie,* read in history books, and the experiences I get from Billy Jo’s stories. Farmers in the west had a lot of pressure on them. Rain was everything for these farmers; it could make or break the whole year for a family. On page 104, the first rain falls. Billy Jo enjoys the sound of the rain and just stands in it. After the rain, all of the farmers go to survey their fields and find them revived, and free of dust. The dust also put a lot of pressure on things. On page 31, a big dust storm comes. While her Pa ran out into the storm, Billy Jo and her Ma covered the beds, put rugs and damp cloths against the doors and windows. Despite all of their efforts, they couldn’t stop the dust from getting in and they could never get it out. On page 79, Billy Jo talks about a volcano eruption in Hawaii, comparing the ash it spewed to the dust they endure every day. On top of the lack of rain and the dust, on page 68, a cloud of grasshoppers devoured everything; the wheat, the garden, the clothes on the line, and Billy Jo’s Ma’s precious apple trees. After all of these troubles, the lack of rain and the dust preventing any crop growth, and the grasshoppers eating anything that was salvageable, the people of Oklahoma were really suffering. The government had to step in and supply food at Billy Jo’s school, lending money and feed, and giving loans, to keep the farmers going.

Billy Jo has many things to overcome through the book. Dust storms, gender roles, crop-less seasons, and more. Her stories tell of a different time and culture than I know; a culture in a place that I find amazing. They’re even more amazing stories coming from a young girl from the times. It brings out more emotion, more passion and more devastation. Billy Jo’s stories bring much culture and social norms to life.